

GUN SAFETY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I do identify with the comments of my colleague, a livable community where our families are healthy.

I wanted to reference just for a moment a concern about the health of American families. One-third of a century ago, the automobile was the focus of our concern. Ralph Nader published a famous book on "Safe At Any Speed," and this Congress, the Federal Government, the industry, embarked upon an aggressive program to make the automobile safer. As a result of extensive data collection, reengineering, legal regulation and, of course, the automobile for years has been personalized so it could only be operated by somebody authorized to use it, today we have seen spectacular increases in automobile safety and a reduction in deaths despite the fact that miles traveled have exploded.

Today, in many communities, gun violence is now surpassing the automobile as the major source of accidental death. Today, I sponsored a forum on Capitol Hill with three leading experts to deal with gun violence. For every 90 minutes in this country, another child dies. The evidence was overwhelming from these experts that gun violence can in fact be reduced.

We had testimony from Professor Stephen Teret of the Johns Hopkins Center for Public Policy and Research; Dr. Steve Hargarten of the Firearm Injury Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin; and Dr. Garen Wintemute of the Violence Prevention Research Program at the University of California-Davis. What these gentlemen were able to demonstrate is that we can in fact take simple steps to do something about the epidemic of gun violence in our community.

First and foremost, we can promote policies that promote safe gun storage. Starting with the State of Florida, 15 States now have enacted legislation that promotes responsible gun ownership and safe gun storage and we have seen a resulting reduction in firearm violence among children.

Second, it does make a difference if we prevent criminals from gaining access to guns at the front end, and there is persuasive evidence that by extending the prohibitions under the Brady law to more criminals, to prevent them from access to guns, that we can have a reduction in their use of guns in their hands.

Finally, there was attention given to something that is often ignored, the design of weapons in the United States. Indeed, it is a sad commentary that there are more restrictions over the product safety of toy guns than of real guns. There is no reason for us to manufacture and sell guns in this country today that do not tell you whether or not there is a bullet in the chamber.

There is no reason today that we have to have guns with automatic clips that when you disengage the clip that it does not sweep the bullet from the chamber. For a few cents to a few dollars, guns can be built that provide this safety device. Many have it. Tragically, too many do not.

Last, and I think most significant, there is no longer any reason for us not to personalize a gun just like we personalize a car with a key, so that somebody who steals that gun, somebody who wrestles a gun away from a law enforcement professional would have that gun disabled. The technology is available today and it is sad that we have not yet taken steps to make sure that it is available to us.

The same strategy that resulted in a dramatic reduction in automobile fatalities in this country can be employed to reduce gun violence. Get good information instead of spreading it over a dozen different agencies in the Federal Government. Have the courage to use and analyze that information and to implement policies that will make a difference for America's families. It is my fervent hope that as we talk about ways to make our communities more livable that we will take safe, simple, commonsense steps to reduce gun violence for the sake of our children. I hope this Congress has the courage to act.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida, Mr. BILIRAKIS, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise proudly to celebrate Greek Independence Day, an event which marked the symbolic rebirth of democracy.

On March 25, 1821, Greece finally rebelled against more than four hundred years of Turkish oppression. The revolution of 1821 brought independence to Greece and emboldened those who still sought freedom across the world. I commemorate Greek Independence Day each year for the same reasons we celebrate our fourth of July. It proved that a united people, through sheer will and perseverance, can prevail against tyranny. The lessons the Greeks and our colonial forefathers taught us provide strength to victims of persecution throughout the world today.

The Greek people, like our colonists, sought the right to govern themselves and determine their country's destiny. In drafting our constitution, American colonial leaders cited Greek and Roman sources. The very basis of our constitution derives from Aristotle and was put into practice in ancient Rome. Our Founding Fathers emulated the efforts of the ancient Greeks in order to establish a balance of powers. The framers sought to avoid the disintegration of government which marked other political systems throughout history. Polybius, an ancient Greek, wrote: "when one part, having grown out of proportion to the others, aims at supremacy and tends to become too dominant, none of the three is absolute."

And so, today, we celebrate the independence of Greece and the principles of democ-

racy that have endured through the present day.

By honoring the Greek struggle for independence, we reaffirm the values and ideas that make our nation great. We also remember why freedom is so important. Abraham Lincoln said "what has once happened will invariably happen again, when the same circumstances which combined to produce it, shall again combine in the same way."

I want to provide some background on Greek Independence Day for the benefit of our colleagues who are not familiar with it. The war of independence, as many call it, began on March 25, 1821. Alexander Ypsilantis and 4,500 volunteers assembled near the Russian border to launch an insurrection against four centuries of Ottoman rule. The Turkish army initially massacred the Greek volunteers, who were poorly organized and insufficiently armed.

When news of Greek uprisings spread, the Turks killed Greek clergymen, clerics, and laity in a frightening display of force. In a vicious act of vengeance in 1822, the Turks invaded the island of Chios and slaughtered 25,000 of the local residents. The invaders enslaved half the island's population of 100,000.

Although the Greeks lacked training, their leaders redoubled efforts to gain independence. "Eleftheria I thanatos"—liberty or death—became the Greek patriots' battle cry. Although many died, they were undeterred from their ultimate goal.

Many acts of heroism fill this history of the Greek war for independence. I would like to share some of these stories with you. Theodoros Kolokotronis was the leader of the Klephts, resilient Greeks who refused to submit to Turkish domination. The Klephts attacked from their mountain strongholds by surprise, battering their oppressors into submission. Kolokotronis assembled an army of 7,000 men who prevented their rivals from replenishing their provisions.

Another great battle took place near Corinth. After a few weeks, the Turks were eventually defeated. Kolokotronis was successful because ordinary citizens displayed extraordinary courage and morale. Despite the odds, Kolokotronis managed to capture Tripolitsa and engineer the Greek victory over the Turkish army of Dramali, which had invaded the Peloponnese with 30,000 men.

Another wave of rebellion against Turkish oppression was ignited by the Suliotes, villagers who took refuge from Turkish authorities in the mountains of Epirus. The fiercely patriotic Suliotes bravely fought the Turks in several battles. News of their victories spread throughout the region and encouraged other villages to revolt. When the Suliote women, left alone, learned that Turkish troops were fast approaching their village, they began to dance the "Syrtos," a patriotic Greek dance. One by one, they committed suicide by throwing themselves and their children off Mount Zalongo. They chose to die rather than surrender and face slavery.

I recount these stories because they underscore Greece's absolute commitment to independence. As we all know, the price of liberty can be very high . . . hundreds of thousands of lives. Socrates, Plato, Pericles, and many other great minds throughout history warned that we maintain democracy only at great cost. The freedom we enjoy today is due to the sacrifices made by men and women in the past.